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Poor Law.
1884.



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592.

HINTS
ON THE MAL-ADMINISTRATION OF THE
POOR LAWS:
WITH A
PLAN
FOR
BRINGING THE COLLECTION AND APPROPRIATION
OF THE
POOR RATES
UNDER THE IMMEDIATE SUPERINTENDENCE AND
CONTROL OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT.

“How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy Stewardship;
for thou mayest be no longer Steward.”

Luke xvi. 2.

London :

PRINTED BY CHARLES SKIPPER AND EAST, ST. DUNSTON'S HILL.

1834.

592.

HINTS
ON THE MAL-ADMINISTRATION OF THE
POOR LAWS.

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“ Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s.”
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AT a moment when the fiscal policy of the Government is a theme of universal disquisition, and the several Classes of Society throughout the Country, are busily engaged in questioning the justice of those Taxes, which each, according to its separate views and interests, pronounces to be the most obnoxious, and, in public meetings, convened for the purpose, are declaring their dissatisfaction with Ministers, because they will not, instead of that they *cannot*, either partially or totally repeal those which they characterize as pressing principally on industry; it may be a very fit time for directing the special attention of the Public to a tax, which, to the amount of nearly NINE MILLIONS a year, weighs heaviest, and, unquestionably, most prejudicially on the industrious portions of society, and from which, it being *directly* within their own control, they might have undoubted relief, in the sum of, perhaps, one half, by a judicious and persevering regard to that which concerns the *local* management of their interests. It is extremely unjust to be ever clamouring that the Government does not inconsiderately reduce taxes, of which, it is well known, the greatest part is mortgaged for the maintenance of public credit, and that the remainder, whatever differences of opinion may exist with respect to the propriety of certain items of public expenditure, is, nevertheless, in a great measure, indispensable; whilst, in reference to a Tax, which it is positively within their own power to diminish considerably, they may be said to be almost inert.

The extraordinary infatuation which prevails throughout the management of Parochial Affairs, and the contrariety of conduct and disposition that it exhibits, are truly astonishing; for the same persons who, with some occasional expressions of discontent, will submit to all the consequences of a wasteful and profuse expenditure, or, perhaps, to that which is worse, in parish transactions,—of which the careful superintendence and power of correction are immediately within themselves,—will eagerly seize on the smallest opportunity for exclaiming against State-administration; and from condemning, very soon proceed to threaten the future rejection of their Representatives in Parliament, for not forcing on the Government measures of relief, to an extent, which, unless the claim of the public creditor, and the preservation of our national rank and importance amongst other States, be wholly disregarded, they must be quite assured cannot be granted. They are ready enough to require from their Representatives in Parliament, all sorts of undigested pledges, to impose on them all sorts of injunctions relative to relief from taxation, and to utter invectives against Ministers; but like the Waggoner who cried out to Jupiter for help, they are sorely afraid of putting their own shoulders to the wheel, and of assisting themselves out of that parish slough, which, in the shape of Poor Rates, they have been long dragging through, but in which, chiefly through their own supineness, they are every succeeding year, as appears by authentic Reports, more deeply steeped. It would be better, therefore, if, instead of unreflectingly censuring national administration, they looked attentively to that of parochial affairs, and, first, “set their own house in order,” by a careful economy of parish funds, and a scrupulous examination of that expenditure which they have the means of *actually* diminishing—not inconsiderably, but it may be safely asserted, to the amount of several millions annually: surely, there would be something gratifying in saving every year, by their own vigilance and exertions, a sum

equal, at the least, to that which they are so sturdily requiring from the Government, and, at the same time, purifying themselves from that disgraceful negligence, profusion, and fraud, which Parishes have been too long suffering from.

Whether or not the mal-practices accompanying the Poor Laws are natural and inherent, and, consequently, have grown with their growth; it is very certain that they have been complained of time out of mind, and that they seem to be inseparably entwined about this noble structure of humanity and charity, until its beauties are obscured, and its destruction almost threatened. Such is the universal condemnation of them, that the Legislature has been, at length, obliged to institute particular enquiries into the nature of abuses so severely felt; for the purpose of devising some certain means for rooting them out, and preserving an Institution, which, instead of being denounced as a national curse, should be regarded as an inestimable benefit. The Commissioners appointed for the investigation have collected, as it appears, very important evidence, which, together with their Report, will form, it is expected, in a future sessions of parliament, the grounds of fresh legislation; still, it is very much to be feared, that they have been obliged to have recourse to those from whom any thing but impartial information could be expected.

It is too much the custom of Parish Authorities to impute a great deal of what is bad in the administration of the Poor Laws, to insufficient and inapplicable provisions, and to allege that, from such defects proceed both the encouragement to improvidence, and the impositions of the depraved; yet, for reasoning's sake, admitting this to be true, to whom, even under these circumstances, should the *success* of the imposter be mainly ascribed? Certainly, more to the *administrators* than to any imperfections in the Laws; and, here is the rub! the persons chosen for parish officers are very often mentally disqualified for the employment, and, not unfrequently, they are otherwise extremely improper characters. Many of them

have not the inclination for discharging their duties, but by far the greatest part, unless very much wronged by public opinion, enter on parish office as a settled means of private advantage. Let it be a question, and a material one, concerning the Poor Laws,—whether Parish Officers themselves have not often taken the lead in fraudulent practices,* and set examples of delinquency which the more humble, though not less apt delinquent, has not failed to follow in a minor degree? The Law of Settlement, alone, is productive of many opportunities to frauds; for besides the great temptation and facility it affords to the wretched impostor, it is a no less notorious fact, that, in some parishes, numbers of out-resident paupers have been continued on the parish books long after they have “passed that bourne whence no traveller returns.” It is the passing on to the proper Parish, as it is termed, which is the foundation of innumerable stratagems and falsehoods, as it encourages the artful, idle vagabond to present himself with a piteous tale, which, though it has not, in all probability, the recommendation of one word of truth, obtains for him, both immediate assistance, and what more may be considered necessary for taking him on to the next, in the way to his pretended Parish. But, where benefit is proposed from deception, can it be surprizing to find it practised by a class whose poverty is proverbially the author of invention? If Parish Officers were less anxious in their enquiries whether the applicant had gained a settlement, and more diligent in ascertaining the truth of his representations, many of the impositions complained of, and an enormous augmentation of expense might be prevented; but can it be wonderful, whilst they only seem desirous of learning just as much as will

* Only a very few years since, a brace of these Paragons were convicted at Shrewsbury Assizes, and subsequently transported, both for fourteen years, for having embezzled in the course of a few months several hundreds of pounds.

justify the passing of him on directly,—nay, urgently, to another parish, and disregardful of every part of his statement excepting what relates to settlement, that there should be those who, aware of this governing principle, make the inattention to every other essential of examination, instrumental to their vicious designs? To all this may be added that aggravating ill, which deters labourers, through the apprehension of “loss of parish,” from removing to one place and another in search of work, and checks that dispersion of labour which by transfer would best ensure its level.

It would appear by the statements of several of these Overseers and Governors of the Poor, that they have artfully contrived to brand the unfortunate Pauper with a tolerably large share of the ills appertaining to the Poor Laws, and most insidiously aimed at acquiring popularity for themselves by giving it as their opinion, that most of the poor are much better off than one half of the Rate Payers, many of whom they had seen dining on potatoes.* Probably, as they have affirmed, many of the paupers might have avoided by a provident conduct, when they had the opportunity, these asylums of poverty,—the Parish Poor-Houses;—but what then? Are

* One of these “Governors” says, that he had often seen Rate Payers dining on potatoes, whilst he returned to the Poor-House and gave the Paupers a dinner of “well-dressed hot meat.” But what would he say of the anti-elysian discipline of some of his compeers, who managing snugly stocked farms belonging to their Parishes, give the wretched Paupers under their care, instead of a dinner of “well dressed hot meat,” whey and potatoes (a common food for pigs) on some days, a morsel of fried bacon and potatoes on others, and, on the succeeding, potatoes with the bacon liquor fat of the day preceding, whilst a great part of the produce is, perhaps, sold, or otherwise disappears.—One of these sentimentalists, not satisfied with their physical improvement, by a course of moderation and abstinence, aims at their moral instruction by running his wife, in his drunken frolics, about the house and grounds, and with a stick in hand cursing her for a W—e. Another, not contented with reasonable perquisites, has an agreement with the Parish Constable for a moiety of the premium allowed for every offender committed through their means to the County Goal; and as there are always a number of scamps about the town, who are just as regardless as, in his zeal, he is careful, of the moral reputation of the parish, these two worthies are seldom without employment in their partnership.

the present poor so much worse than those of preceding generations, that they have originated the crime of improvidence? On the contrary, it may be asserted without the fear of contradiction that, formerly, after the aged, blind, lame, and all otherwise impotent, the next most likely dependents on parish bounty were the improvident; because, until recent years, the willing and able bodied labourer was sure of employment, and of that rate of wages which his labours deserved, and, therefore, not very likely to prefer the restraints of a Work-house, and the petty tyranny of its master, to the enjoyment of his own fire side and freedom. By the accounts of some of these parish "sons of pomp," who evidently cherish a very strong, if not "*hereditary*" prejudice against all poor, it might be inferred that their poor houses are perfect Elysiums—Parish Paradises! where, besides being pampered and surfeited with the good things of this life, all are at rest from labour. Now, granting this to be true, whose is the fault? Surely, the Poor Laws do not hold out such premiums for idleness. No; the Poor Laws are sufficiently explicit in their declared motive to "*set the poor on work.*" The truth is, that the innovations on them have proceeded, hand in hand, with those extensive revolutions of property, which, ever since the War of American Independence have convulsively disturbed, and alternately distressed, every now and then, the agricultural and manufacturing classes, and have threatened the nation, more than once, with the most alarming disasters; whereas, it should have been the great object, as it was the duty, of parishes, in the midst of calamities attributable to national, rather than to individual improvidence, as our debt of nearly a THOUSAND MILLIONS OF POUNDS indelibly testifies, to have discriminated, in the admittance to parochial aid, between the aged and the young—the infirm and the strong—the industrious and the idle. Most assuredly, there is a something very anomalous in the statements relative to our working population, for, at the same moment that the Government is

declaring that the causes of the great sufferings of the labouring poor have been, and still are gradually passing away, the Parochial Authorities are showing up annually, a progressively increasing Tax, under the denomination of Poor Rates. One thing is, however, indisputable;—that there is great wrong somewhere: still, it is not in the Laws as originally framed and intended; it is neither in the letter nor in the spirit. The impotent of every description have a natural and undeniable claim on humanity for protection; but, in the permanent addition of the willing and able-bodied labourer, there is a claimant whose case is, if possible, still more deplorable.

Unhappily, it is not necessary to search very deeply for one great cause of the enormously large contributions annually demanded for the poor, when nothing is more easy than to refer to Parishes in which, by a most unpardonable apathy of the parishioners, the Vestries (Select! including sometimes an uncertificated bankrupt) and Churchwardens have been, with little exception, the same for years, and, of the Overseers, it is the custom to appoint a perpetual, or, *standing one*, in the Master of the Work-House. From such Directors of Parish Affairs what can be hoped? But, “they are all honorable men,” and, no doubt, such are their melancholy broodings over the distressed condition of the *Potatoe-Eating-Rate-Payers, that, if one could only be permitted to have a momentary view of some of their official meetings against

* Yet, how does their sympathy dove tail with the fact of Churchwardens, now and then, directing and themselves performing in their own line of business, under cover of another name, those additions, alterations, and repairs in Parish Churches, of which, when too late for available objections, through a remissness at the proper stage of proceedings, the unfortunate “Potatoe-Eating-Rate-Payers” experience the distressing effects, in the necessity, perhaps, for retrenching even a portion of that swinish meal; and of triple headed bipeds, in the likeness of Overseer, Assistant Overseer, and Workhouse Master, quietly and gradually acquiring Property of no mean value, whilst much of their time is spent in Taverns, and their families are enjoying the luxuries of both the table and dress.

which cadaverous Envy has so often loosed her lank tongue, we should discover lachrymal gloom instead of bacchanalian revelry.

Besides the abuses adverted to, there are other grave causes for the alarming increase of this burdensome tax ; and, of the number, perhaps, no one has been more conducive to pauperism amongst the agricultural population, than the many acts of parliament, during the last fifty years, for the enclosing of the Common Lands. Formerly, on the skirts, or in the vicinity of those lands, which were to be found, more or less, as the common property of most townships, and making part of most manors, a Labourer could keep a Cow, a few head of Sheep, with a Pig or two and some Poultry; by which means he not only provided for rent, and some part of the necessaries for the family, but, what was of no small importance, it gave him that feeling of independence—which is the best security for his moral worth.* Conclusive evidence of the great good to the labouring poor from these natural advantages is, if requisite, to be found in the measures now being resorted to by influential individuals, and by societies expressly formed, for granting, or letting at a very trifling rent to the poor, small strips of land ; thus, by the substitution of a sort of special boon for a common right, tacitly acknowledging the great impolicy, if not injustice, of the all-grasping enclosure Acts.

Then, again, our Manufacturing Population are grievously affected by the Corn Laws, not only as the price of this most material article of food is, in itself, enhanced, but as it influences the prices of all other farm produce, from the standard of value that it forms for both land and product.

And, as a consummation of distress, the Debt which sits

* In the parish of Ruyslip, near Uxbridge, there was only three or four years ago, a man keeping a small huckster's shop, who did not hesitate to assert that, before the enclosing of that Common, he made by the run it afforded for a Horse, and what he made of a Cow, with a few head of Sheep, not less than £18 yearly. Was not this provision against pauperism ?

like an incubus on Industry, is, with relation to the interest of it, perpetually weighing down, and oppressing the productive classes of every description,

Whatever alterations in the Poor Laws may be resolved on, it will be expedient to consider most attentively the *first* intentions of them, together with the nature of the irregularities and malversations hitherto practised; but, above all, to endeavour to fix on some certain and efficacious plan for their being administered, as their isolated character furnishes no tried and established precedent, either in this or any other country, for a sure guidance to perfection; and whatever differences of opinion may arise in the progress of re-constructing them, there can scarcely be a dissentient from the suggestion, that the time is arrived at which the administration of this tax might be beneficially transferred into the hands of Government. There is evidently wanting a powerful and concentrated control, which, besides authoritatively and vigilantly regulating the expenditure, should lead through a uniform system of Accounts and Returns, to a direct and intimate knowledge of the several descriptions of Poor as well as of the expences relating to them. Administered as these Laws are now, neither the partial nor collective amount of Rates, in one or all the districts, affords any criterion of *actual* distress, for the expenditure is so generally mismanaged, that it would avail nothing to attempt any development by contrasting that of one Parish or District with another. If the Government were supplied periodically and simultaneously with Accounts and Returns from every Parish, (*to facilitate which they might be specially united and their numbers thus diminished,*) it might be always in possession of a volume of information, furnishing at once both particular and aggregate accounts of distress as well as of expenditure, and a tolerably sure index to that trade or source of employment which happened to be most in depression, and in want of assistance.

Laws of such humane transcendancy as to bear in their

form the resemblance to divine prescript, never should have incurred the odium of directing an onerous tax, but have been always rather viewed as regulating a generous contribution, which, for the sake of apportionment and permanency, is raised by assessment of rental; and in order to preserve such a fund from the stigma of demoralization, as well as to obtain and secure for it, the unimpeachable reputation of a Charity for exclusively alleviating the distresses of the truly unfortunate, it is principally necessary to place such restraints on parish officers, in the course of their expenditure, as shall check deviations by the well inclined, and prevent fraudulence by the ill disposed.

The large Loans to Government, and the unparalleled expences of the last War, have brought upon the nation those financial embarrassments, from which extrication seems to be impossible, and occasioned to the productive classes, in particular, great sufferings; and although we are still able to compete with foreign markets, and to maintain even a superiority over them, in the cheapness of manufactures, yet, sooner or later, unless our inventive powers are supernaturally decreed to be inexhaustible, we must be overtaken in the commercial race between this and other countries, and as surely over-matched, carrying, as we do, nearly a THOUSAND MILLIONS OF POUNDS dead weight; though it is easier to predict such a result than the probable date of its occurrence. What, therefore, is chiefly to be hoped, is, that the revolutionary shock will not be so violent, as, in the depreciation of commercial property, to injure seriously that of all other classes throughout the kingdom.

Machinery and Manufactures have greatly diverted employment from its former channels, by the tinsel glare of better wages, with the opportunity to employ every member of a family, even to the infant of seven or eight years old, and enticed many by these seeming advantages from sturdy health-promoting labours, into those of emaciating, palsy-

stews; of which, however, one certain consequence is, that the poor houses are supplied with an incredible number of victims to the early debility inseparable from unwholesome occupations, and those feverish excesses to which the hours of relaxation seductively induce, by persons closely engaged in congregated labours. Without subjecting the judgment to any very censurable impeachment, it may be hazarded, as an expectancy, that, in the course of eventful rotation, they will succeed to that depression which, since the Peace, has been the lot of the agriculturist, who it should be remembered had, during the War, *his* stage of intoxicating prosperity when had any one foretold the termination of high prices and high wages, he would have been scoffed at as a fool, and the croaking harbinger of misfortune.

Having adverted to the probable advantages of concentrating the management of the Poor, and making it an executive part of the State-Economy, it may be admissible to suggest a plan that should not be attended with much expence, for regulating and controlling the expenditure, and condensing the Accounts.

To accomplish these important purposes, there might be a Board*, consisting of the Minister of the Parish, whose duties as the parish Pastor, joined to the imposing character of his sacred office, most eminently qualify him for a Principal in the *active* superintendence of the treatment of the poor; the two nearest resident Magistrates, two Churchwardens, two, or more, Overseers, as may be, and eight other parishioners, to assemble weekly at the Poor-House, to hear and consider of all cases brought before them, as well as of any which, from their urgency, the overseers, on their own discretion, might have relieved in the interval.

* This Board to control, likewise, the Churchwardens, in the manner that they are now controlled by Vestry, and bring them, as well as the Overseers, within its direction and superintendence, with respect to Rates, Appropriations, and Accounts.

At this Board, all applicants for relief to be examined, and all matters relating to the Poor to be brought forward and discussed; and all *executive* arrangements determined on *only* by a plurality of voices: an equal division to carry the question in the affirmative.

Of the proceedings of the Board, minutes to be made by the Overseers, in a book to be kept in the board room, and before the breaking up of the board, to be signed by all the members. A copy of the minutes to be made by the overseers, and, properly countersigned, forwarded with the monthly accounts.

The Master and Matron of the Workhouse to keep each four books; one for an account of Provisions; a second for Necessaries; another for Materials; and the fourth for an account of Labour performed, and to lay them before the board weekly, whose inspection should be vouched by their signatures.

The Overseers to keep, also, four books; one for an account, clearly and fully set forth, of all Monies received and expended; a second for Provisions; another for Necessaries; and a fourth for Materials,—the three last, showing distinctly and fully, the purchases and the supplies to the master and matron. These to be produced at the board weekly, and after being checked, (with respect to provisions, necessaries, and materials by those of the master and matron,) to be subscribed by all the members in proof of examination.

The Overseers to make up monthly, accounts of cash, provisions, necessaries, and materials, which, being approved by the members and vouched by their signatures, should be forwarded to the County Treasurer, in order to being submitted to the Magistrates at Quarter Sessions, who, through the means of the Treasurer, should, at the end of every three months, first incorporate the monthly accounts of each parish,—that is, the totals, agreeably to their respective headings, into a respective one for the quarter, and next the quarterly

account of each parish into one General Quarterly Account of the whole County, which, with the sub-monthly accounts and such remarks as might occur, should be, as early as possible, transmitted to the Secretary for the Home Department, or such other establishment as might be deemed advisable.

At the end of every quarter, Lists of the names of all Paupers, classed according to the several denominations of relief, showing the causes of relief, age, trade, or employment, date of admittance and discharge from the house, or otherwise, with any other remarks that might be deemed expedient, to be prepared by the Overseers, and, after being countersigned by the board, forwarded to the county treasurer to be laid before the magistrates at quarter sessions, by whom they should be transmitted to the Secretary of the Home Office.

All supplies for the house, to be furnished by Contracts not exceeding three months, for which notices of Tenders to the board, should be affixed to the doors of the church and poor house, and such other means of public advertisement, as might seem necessary, be adopted.

Tenders for contracts to be opened at the Board only, and the signatures of the members, to those accepted, to constitute their validity. Copies of all tenders and contracts to be sent with the accounts next ensuing.

In the entrance chamber or hall of every poor house, there should be fixed up a painted Board, stating the description and quantity of provisions allowed daily for each pauper, and of all other regulations requiring similar publicity.

In every poor house, a book in which to register the visits and remarks of the board should be kept, and a copy made monthly by the master, which, countersigned by the members, should be transmitted with the Overseer's accounts.

The Minister to visit the poor house, not less than twice in every week, independently of a board visitation, to enquire particularly into the moral condition of its inmates and their

treatment, and note his visit, with his observations (if any) in the Register.

The Overseers, jointly or separately, as might be agreed on between themselves, to visit the poor house on every day in the week, excepting Sunday, and examine into the order and cleanliness throughout the establishment, and the employment of its inmates, and note their visits and observations in the register.

The Board, at the weekly meeting, before proceeding to the business of the day, to visit in a body the several wards, examine into the condition and occupations of the paupers, receive and consider of any complaints between master and pauper; and to register their visits and opinions.

The Master and Matron, on no account to be man and wife, but single persons without incumbrance. A regulation which any one acquainted with the internal management of poor houses, must be thoroughly satisfied is necessary.

Every poor house to have under the master and matron, two departments respectively; one of which should be used as an infirmary for the sick, the aged, and all otherwise impotent, and the other as a work-house, in which all capable of work should be placed, and somehow employed either in or out of the house. That pernicious custom of money allowances to paupers residing out of the house, without any sort of productiveness in exchange, should be discountenanced, as much as possible, and, unless it happen that the parish cannot really provide work, be discontinued: excepting always those cases of *temporary* distress arising from sickness or other misfortune, which timely aid might alleviate and prospectively check; when the board should be empowered to afford it, notwithstanding that the applicant possess some small means of subsistence, if satisfied that to leave the party without any assistance, in the way that is usual towards small cotters possessing a cow or other trifling property, would be to produce ultimately downright pauperism;—but the assist-

ance should be distinctly as a gift, and neither as a loan nor continuous. Great caution would be requisite in the exercise of this discretion, and most satisfactory evidence of the necessity for relief should be recorded in the minute book.

Not under any excuse, should there be attached to a poor house, any land beyond what might be necessary for the production of common culinary vegetables; as, in many of the agricultural parishes in which land is hired for the alleged purposes of employment and profit, it is a certain cause of considerable speculation, of which the detection is no easy matter, in consequence of the complexity of accounts and the want of leisure and unity in parishioners for the requisite investigations.

As the basis of a fund for carrying into execution the proposed arrangements, there should be levied on all rental of £10 and upwards, a uniform poundage, and, for all succeeding contributions, there should be at the end of every three or six months, a local rate, according to what had been the amount of the parochial charge for the quarter or half year then ended, as an effectual method of making every parish careful of its particular expenditure; and once a week, the overseers should pay their collections into the District or Savings' Bank in the gross, and on no pretence retain any part.

All payments of £5 and upwards to be made by special order of the overseers on the bank, countersigned by the minister and magistrates.

The Assessment Books should be preserved constantly in the board room, and copies or extracts made by the Overseers for the purpose of collection. The week's collection to be entered on every board day.

A book of "GENERAL ACCOUNT" of Cash, in which Overseers should enter their weekly receipts and payments; another of provisions; a third for necessaries, and a fourth for materials, in which they should enter, also, their quanti-

ties and supplies, should be kept in the board room, and being regularly signed by the Overseers and members, should at the end of every twelve months be completed as a series, and deposited in a chamber of records.

On every board day these records should be accessible to every rate-payer, on payment of a trifle.

At the end of each year, and, at the latest, within one month following, there should be placed in every sitting of the parish church, for the information of parishioners generally, a printed statement of the receipts and disbursements of the parish, during the twelve months, showing under their several headings the respective totals only.

The duties of the Overseers and other eight parishioners to cease at the expiration of every three or six months, and two, or more, other officers with eight different parishioners, to be nominated by the Minister and two Magistrates, from an alphabetical list of land and householders. Of this list, which should include none under the yearly rental of £10, nor any above the age of 65, one copy should be always affixed to the church and another to the poor-house doors, and the nomination be made in the following order; namely, for two* Overseers and two Churchwardens, one from the beginning, another from the ending, and two from the middle of the list, and for the other eight parishioners, two from the beginning, two from the ending, and four from the middle; the object of this method being more to prevent dissatisfaction in parishioners, whose alphabetical priority, if the names were taken consecutively from the beginning of the alphabet, might in extensive parishes, lead to a jealous regard of those standing at the bottom of it, than with a view to any other useful result.

The name of every new occupant, liable to nomination,

* In those parishes having three or four overseers, the additional one or two, might be taken, in the first case, from the middle, and in the last, from the beginning and ending.

to be inserted in the list, and the name of every one quitting effaced from it, and the one just entering the parish, if he would have been previously liable by alphabetical order, to be called on in the course of the next nomination.

None of the eight quarterly nominee parishioners to be called, within the next six months following the termination of their service, to the duties of Overseer.

Besides reducing the term of office as Overseer, from twelve to three or six months as an inducement to a more zealous discharge of its duties, it might be desirable that in extensive and largely populated parishes, of which a great number of the householders might be fairly reckoned on as wealthy, the nomination list should be confined to persons whose yearly rental exceeded £25, and that those nominated to the duties of Overseers and Churchwardens should pay, at the least, a rental of £50. In the metropolitan and its suburban parishes, and in all others of a certain extent and proportion of opulent householders, this might be a preferable arrangement for imposing the duties on those whose superior eligibility might be presumed from pecuniary circumstances, of which rental might be considered a tolerably just criterion.

All books and vouchers of the Overseers at the end of their servitude, and those of the master and matron, at the end of every year, to be deposited in the record office.

And, in order to enforce all regulations of the Legislature, there should be for every dereliction from them,* fines of proportionate consequence.

It may be objected to some of the previous details that they are superfluous, and that of others, more needful, there

* A principal disadvantage of Select Vestries, is the want of a fine for non-attendance. It is a fact, that parish affairs are greatly injured by the inattention of those chosen for their management. Meetings are frequently adjourned, on account of non-attendance, and what is much worse, two or three of the members generally more punctual than the rest, may be said to have the entire direction of the parish business instead of twenty or more regulating it.

is a deficiency, but as the present intention is rather to propose the outline of a plan than to perfect one, it may be sufficient if none of them are impracticable, or howsoever modified, substantially inapt for the ends to be attained. The great objects in desire are control and reduction of expenditure, and these are never more likely to be accomplished than by a system, which, besides bringing into a focus the authority of administration, shall directly and actively superintend the expenditure throughout the country.

The great benefit to the nation at large from the adoption of any such plan, would soon be experienced in not only the great reduction of a burthen which amounts, at present, to a full *fifth* part of the national expenditure, but in a visible improvement of the condition of the industrious classes; the unfortunate of whom it is too much the practice to stigmatize with all the consequences of the mal-administration of those, who, appointed for their protection and relief, first neglect and then traduce them.

But, to perfect any system and give it efficacy, that part of the Law of Settlement which relates to applicants for aid, whose places of birth are in England and Wales, should be amended, and actual *location* be allowed to establish the claim for relief: the benefits would be three fold; imposition would be greatly checked, expence of removal saved, and labour better distributed.

And those relating to Bastardy should be reconsidered, as it might appear on a mature investigation, that, instead of the advantages proposed to the common weal from their operation, they are fraught with many and most deplorable evils. In the manner they now act, they offer nothing less than premiums, in the form of annuities, for incontinency; which, to make the case worse, are generally paid, in the greatest part, by the inculpable, in consequence of the decease of some, and the absconding of others of the putative fathers. Then, they induce many improvident marriages, which many

contract to avoid the weekly pay; whilst others, calculating on the weekly stipend as a sort of marriage dower, will not scruple to prefer that woman, whose illicit offspring are most numerous. Further, girls are not so cautious, nor are their parents so watchful, of their intercourse with the other sex, because, aware of the consequences of pregnancy,—support or marriage,—they will hazard the one with a view to obtain the other; always certain that, if they do not absolutely rise in value in the market, in proportion to their illicit fecundity, their bastardy portion will be no obstacle, but, with some men, rather a motive to take them in marriage. It would be well to weigh deliberately and without prejudice, what are the consequences in those countries, where, instead of bastardy penalties, hospitals are provided for the reception of all children that, from whatever cause, may be consigned to the care of that legal parent, the State. There can scarcely be a doubt but that the certainty of being obliged to maintain illicit offspring by self exertion, or to violate the most forcible ties of nature by alienation, would materially fortify those reflections which are opposed to indiscretion. And it may be questionable, whether the present Bastardy Laws, in addition to their other effects, do not greatly contribute to the crime of infanticide, through the dread of that exposure, which parish officers, in their execution of them, very frequently aggravate, by sporting with the feelings of their wretched object, in the use of vulgar mirth and obscene jests.

As another means to lessen Pauperism, and raise the moral character of the labouring population in the agricultural districts; and, in furtherance, at the same time, of the government scheme for annuities, after a certain age, in return for weekly instalments, which, unfortunately, from the great lapse of time necessary to benefit by it, partakes so much of "hope deferred," as to be very nearly tantamount to despair, might there not be a plan for grants of land, at an early date, in the manner of life hold? For instance, suppose that to be

entitled to one square rood of land during life, an individual, should pay weekly one shilling, commencing at the age of eighteen, for three years, and that for a continuance of similar instalments, he should be entitled at the end of every third succeeding year to the same quantity of land, with a progressing additional eighth for every triennial termination: thus, for the 1st termination, 1 square rood.

2nd	"	$1\frac{1}{8}$	"
3rd	"	$1\frac{1}{4}$	"
4th	"	$1\frac{3}{8}$	"
5th	"	$1\frac{1}{2}$	"
6th	"	$1\frac{5}{8}$	"
7th	"	$1\frac{3}{4}$	"
8th	"	$1\frac{7}{8}$	"
9th	"	2	"

until he would be possessed, at the age of 45, of three acres, one rood and a half.

It is necessary to observe, that this design is not suggested with attention to any of the scales for annuities, formed on a calculation of reciprocal benefit, but, principally as a measure for promoting prudence and economy, with conjoined habits of industry, in one portion of the working classes, and to raise them gradually from that degradation, in which political, more than any other causes have conspired to place them. In a matter affecting the comforts of the labouring poor, and which has, for its paramount object, their rescue from depression and starvation, a strict attention to those rules of computation for regulating prospective annuities may be dispensed with, and a sacrifice by the State no more objected to than in the vote of the twenty millions for slave emancipation. To confine this advantage to those for whom it would be intended, it should not be extended to any others than those in the receipt of daily or weekly pay, and whose wages did not exceed a particular sum.

If, in addition, there could be devised a particular manufacture, for employment in poor houses,—such as might be found in the preparation of flax and hemp, and the subsequent making of linen and cordage, it would contribute greatly to the intention of Poor Laws, which, after a provision for the impotent, must be to provide employment for willing and able industry, in exchange for afforded protection. A measure of this sort might not be wholly unworthy of consideration; for, perhaps, besides restoring to the humbler classes of females those former habits of industry, so preferable to that present profligacy and detestable canting which, any one acquainted with our small country towns and villages, can bear witness to the sad effects of, it might be made somewhat of a store supply, in both articles, for the army and navy, or, at the worst, sold by public auction.

Throughout all Parishes, more or less of discontent at the sums in which they are assessed for the *alleged* support of the Poor is observable,—not from any uncharitable disposition to withhold relief, but because of the many reasons for doubting the just application of them.

It is a melancholy truth that many Parish Officers pass a great part of their time, one day after another, tippling and soaking in public houses, whilst the industrious shopkeeper, the labouring farmer, and the hard-working mechanic, are toiling, in some measure, for those very rates which such men dispose of; and the in-door pauper is, perhaps, silently mourning that the proper food allowed and paid for by the parish is withheld; yet, the apprehension of being visited with a parish apprentice, or some other disagreeable, too frequently intimidates parishioners from those outward expressions of reprehension which such conduct loudly demands.

One of the consequences of such frequent and considerable calls for money in the name of the Poor is the creation of a downright hostile feeling, instead of any sympathy in their distresses, and thus the Poor Laws, which are based on

the first and best principles of humanity, are no longer regarded with a benign feeling, because, being perverted from legitimate to selfish purposes, they are said to have a tendency to encourage idleness and improvidence, although it is with these as with many other institutions that have originated in, and are founded on, the noblest and wisest principles;—opinions of them are pronounced, not according to their intrinsic merits, but in accordance with the manner in which they are administered.

There are, however, relative duties to which all, of whatsoever station in society, are imperatively bound; and those parishioners whose pecuniary condition subjects them to rates have not finally fulfilled theirs, unless convinced that the poor really benefit to the extent of the relief provided for them, and that their contributions are in no way misapplied or abused; for a confirmation of which, only examine into the internal management of many poor houses, and after satisfying the wretched inmates of protection from the ominous frowns of the master, and from those annoyances that, in the way of punishment are too much in his power, it will soon be seen, whether the parishioner's duty is wholly performed by a compliance with the parish officers' requisitions for money. But of all parochial mismanagement, there cannot be a worse symptom of gross neglect of the unhappy pauper, as well as of indifference of parishioners to their own interests, than the election of the Master of a Workhouse to the offices of Overseer and Assistant Overseer; and no sort of idiotism connected with parish affairs, can compare with that of uniting in one person, employments which, from their different characters should be kept most distinct. The idea of a Master of a Workhouse being his *own* overseer is most preposterous and a great reproach to those parishes in which it exists; and shows either a most consummate ignorance of the distinguishing duties of the two situations, or, what is much worse, a perfect indifference to the treatment of the

poor. Perhaps, it will be said that there are always two overseers;—yes, that is true; still, what security is in that when the second may be a shopkeeper, or other sort of tradesman, who, from a greedy, grovelling disposition, cares for naught but the hope of supplying, at some time, the poor house with such articles as in his line of business may be necessary, or, some egregious oaf who is content to be led about the parish, from house to house, like a muzzled bear. In proof of how much parish business is mismanaged, it would not be difficult to give almost countless instances. In one parish in London one hundred thousand pound weight of meat and cheese were stated to have been wasted in one year. In another, the Overseers supplied themselves with shoes at the expence of the parish. In others, again, money has been applied to the payment of opera singers, &c. and the most extravagant feasting.

Certainly, it would be very unjust, because of the fraudulent practices of some, that all holding similar trusts should be indiscriminately slandered; yet such instances are naturally calculated to arouse public attention and to induce any alterations which, conformably to the maxim of all Laws, “that they are to provide against what men *may*, and not what they *will* do,” will promote confidence: and, most decidedly, parishioners cannot be too much impressed with the importance of a subject which, somehow or other, they seem to consider, consists only in the amount of the payments demanded of them, nor made too sensible of the propriety of conducting parish expenditure in a manner that, instead of engendering ill will against the wretched pauper, whose lot is sufficiently humiliating and distressing, should set them on to a steady and serious control of parish funds. Much might be urged on the matter; but, whatever may be the other ill-judged arrangements, there cannot be a doubt but that the Master of a Workhouse, was intended *only* for the superintendence of the internal regulations belonging to it, and the

distribution of the supplies provided by Overseers, and not to be the supervisor of his own deeds. The Legislature when it prescribed the *annual* election of parish officers, and, as a consequence, the *annual* exhibition of their accounts, evidently foresaw both the opportunities and temptations to do wrong, and wisely endeavoured to guard against them, as much as possible, by making the offices, excepting that of the "Governor," of short duration; therefore, if the foundation of parish management be in no otherwise disturbed, at any rate, all monopoly of office should be proscribed, the election of fresh officers *annually* made imperative, and the conjunction of Overseer or Assistant Overseer, and Master of a Workhouse strictly prohibited.

The preceding remarks are partly for the purpose of rescuing the Poor Laws from those prejudices to which they are most undeservedly subjected, and the unhappy pauper from that unkind temper with which it is too much the custom to regard him, but, in a great measure, to convince rate-payers that most of the evils of which they complain might be greatly, if not wholly avoided, by a prudent selection of parish officers, and that it is in their *own* power to secure such a provident use of parish funds as would diminish, in a considerable degree, that burthen of NINE MILLIONS a year which presses so heavily on Industry.

FINIS.

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